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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the use of metaphor analysis as a research tool in education, specifically second or foreign language (L2/FL) education, recommending the application of sociocultural theory as a coherent framework to explain how L2/FL teachers construct metaphorical conceptualizations of their profession. It presents examples from a study supporting the view of metaphor as a socially grounded cognitive tool mediating the way English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers speak and think about their field. The study examined the extent to which teachers appropriated metaphors and used them for constructing their own personal belief systems. Teachers read the prompt, "An ESL teacher is like..." then wrote an original metaphor that best represented how they saw themselves as ESL teachers, also identifying assumptions and theories underlying the metaphors. Results revealed a complex process of appropriation and transformation, whereby the conventional metaphors of the group were adopted in a largely intact fashion, but with varying underlying conceptualizations reflecting differences in individual mappings across conceptual domains and in the influence of both multiple social voices and personal teaching experience. The paper recommends the use of metaphor as a tool to increase self-reflection among L2/FL teachers. Appendix includes table of conceptual metaphors, exemplar metaphors, and examines defining what "an ESL teacher is like." (Contains 44 references.) (SM)

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Metaphor Analysis in Second/Foreign Language Instruction: A Sociocultural Perspective[1]

AAAL Annual Meeting, St. Louis, Missouri
February 24, 2001

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Metaphor Analysis in Second/Foreign Language Instruction: A Sociocultural Perspective[1]

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Metaphors play an important role in second language learning theory and in applied linguistics research. Several recent publications are evidence of a new interest in metaphor within the second/foreign language (L2/FL) field (Block, 1999; Cameron and Low, 1999a, 1999b; Lantolf, 1996; Oxford et al., 1998). Three important features of metaphor are recognized in the literature: (1) the pervasiveness of metaphors in the language teaching profession, (2) their ability to capture complex constructs in the field, and (3) their usefulness as vehicles for reflection and consciousness raising among educators. In this paper, we first review the use of metaphor analysis as a research tool in education and specifically in the L2/FL field. We then call for the application of sociocultural theory as a coherent framework that can explain how L2/FL teachers construct metaphorical conceptualizations of their profession. Finally, we present examples from an empirical study supporting the view of metaphor as a socially grounded cognitive tool mediating the way ESL teachers speak and think about their field.

Metaphor analysis in education

Metaphor analysis is a method that systematically examines elicited or spontaneous metaphors in discourse as a means for uncovering underlying conceptualizations. The methodology of metaphor analysis involves collecting examples of linguistic metaphors and generalizing from them to the conceptual metaphors they represent (Cameron & Low, 1999a, p. 88). In education research, metaphor analysis has long been used as a heuristic to raise awareness about theoretical assumptions, challenge established beliefs, and promote change in classroom

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practices (Bullough, 1991; Marchant, 1992; Marshall, 1990; Munby, 1987; Richards, Gipe, & Duffy, 1992; Roth, 1993; Strickland & Iran-Nejad, 1994; Tobin, 1990). In general, researchers agree that metaphors are widespread social habits that are part of teachers' discourse providing access to commonly held beliefs about their profession.

Studies indicate that teachers often make use of metaphorical language when talking about their profession, their beliefs, and their daily practices (Munby, 1987; Tobin, 1990). The use of conventional metaphors for memory, teaching, learners, and communication (such as "mind as container," "classroom as workplace," "learner as receptacle," and "language as conduit") has been found to be widespread in the language of teachers (Munby, 1987; Strickland & Iran-Nejad, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). Mayer (1996) has identified three major metaphors in the 20th century: "learning as response strengthening," "learning as information processing," and "learning as knowledge construction," whereas Sfard (1998) has singled out two dominant metaphors to characterize learning: the traditional "acquisition" metaphor and the newer "participation" metaphor.

Metaphor in L2/FL teaching

In L2/FL teaching and learning, metaphorical language has been found to be extensive and influential (Block, 1992, 1999; Cameron & Low, 1999a; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Danahy, 1986; Herron, 1982; Kinginger, 1997; Lantolf, 1996; Nattinger, 1984; Oxford et al., 1998; Thornbury, 1991). Some of the metaphors that have been identified in the L2/FL literature are the mind-is-like-body metaphor, the production metaphor, the L2 learner as child L1 learner (Herron, 1982), and the computational metaphor (Nattinger, 1984). According to Firth and Wagner (1997) some of the most prevalent metaphorical conceptualizations in SLA include a general view of learners

as defective communicators, of communication as information transfer from one head to another, and of communicative encounters as problematic. Both Thornbury (1991) and Kinginger (1997) suggest ways in which metaphors can be used for reflection and development among FL teachers.

While the value of pursuing metaphorical analysis in L2/FL instruction is acknowledged, little empirical research has been conducted (Block, 1992; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Ellis, 1998; Oxford et al., 1998). Block (1992), for example, investigated the extent to which ESL/EFL teachers and students employed two macro-metaphors: (1) teacher as contracted professional/learner as respected client and (2) teacher as supportive parent/learner as respected child, finding a possible gap between the teachers' and the students' view of these metaphorical roles. Using a variety of data sources, Oxford et al. (1998) found four major philosophical perspectives with corresponding archetypal metaphorical teacher roles (molding, gatekeeping, gardening, and democratizing). In a cross-cultural study among language teachers and students, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) identified various conceptual metaphors for teaching, language, and learning (for example, "teaching is a journey," "language is nature," and "learning is light"). Finally, Ellis (1998) found seven basic metaphors for "learner" in the SLA literature (container, machine, negotiator, problem-solver, builder, fighter, and investor) and five metaphorical constructions by L2 learners themselves (sufferer, problem-solver, traveler, fighter, and worker).

A sociocultural perspective of metaphorical conceptualization

The preceding review of studies provides a glimpse of the most prevalent metaphors in the field of L2/FL instruction. What is missing, however, is a coherent theoretical framework that can explain how L2/FL teachers construct metaphorical conceptualizations of their profession. We believe that Vygotskyan sociocultural theory can perform this function. In its view of the

cognitive and the social as two inseparable domains, sociocultural theory can bridge the gap between purely cognitive approaches to metaphor analysis and more socially based explanations of metaphor (Cameron, 1999, p. 4).[2] The need for a comprehensive view of metaphor is recognized by Cameron (1999): "Vygotskyan notions of the interactive nature of the relation of language and thought, and 'the social formation of mind' . . . , can be used to construct theory-level frameworks for metaphor that integrate the *socio-cultural and the cognitive*" (italics added, p. 12). It is important to stress that in Vygotskyan sociocultural theory the socio-cultural and the cognitive are not two separate, independent realms. Rather, sociocultural theory posits a dialectic relationship between the cognitive and the social, whereby the mind and, by extension, the metaphorical conceptualizations that mediate mental processes are seen as both products and determinants of the social environment. To clarify the theoretical framework of our research, we quote Lantolf (2000b):

> Sociocultural theory holds that specifically human forms of mental activity arise in the interactions we enter into with other members of our culture and with the specific experiences we have with the artifacts produced by our ancestors and by our contemporaries. *Rather than dichotomizing the mental and the social, the theory insists on a seamless and dialectic relationship between these two domains* [italics added]. In other words, not only does our mental activity determine the nature of our social world, but this world of human relationships and artifacts also determines to a large extent how we regulate our mental processes. (p. 79)

Within sociocultural theory, a set of ideas largely based on Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) writings, thinking is mediated by culturally created artifacts, some of which, like metaphor, are

linguistically organized (Lantolf, 2000a, p. 13). Conventional metaphors, in particular, are largely frozen forms of language which emerge in specific social, cultural, and historical circumstances and are appropriated in the course of social interaction for use as psychological tools in the construction of personal understandings (Sfard, 1998; Wertsch, 1985). In this view, metaphors, like other semiotic tools, function as mediational means acquired in the intermental plane for intramental use in knowing, meaning making, and guiding behavior. The concept of metaphor as cultural artifact mediating thinking is consistent with recent ethnographic conceptions of the mind posing metaphor as an important type of cultural model (Shore, 1996).

Vygotskyan sociocultural theory argues that there is a fundamental transformation in mental functioning with the introduction of a psychological tool. On this, Wertsch (1985) comments: "In [Vygotsky's] approach psychological tools are not viewed as auxiliary means that simply facilitate an existing mental function while leaving it qualitatively unaltered. Rather, the emphasis is on their capacity to transform mental functioning" (p. 79). Metaphor, as a cognitive tool, also has the potential to radically transform mental functioning. This transformative power has been observed to have unfortunate consequences in the case of the conduit metaphor, which–as Wertsch (1995) and Reddy (1993) point out–has distorted our view of communication to such an extent that it is very difficult to conceive of language and communication in other ways. But metaphor appropriation doesn't have to be seen as a simple process of copying unaltered the metaphorical units of language and thought used by the social group. There is always an element of personal reconstruction in the internalization of culturally shared linguistic tools, as individuals are affected by various personal experiences and by exposure to multiple social discourses. The Bakhtinian notion of "heteroglossia," that is, the idea that multiple social

voices come to be embedded in the voice of individual users (Bakhtin, 1981), is helpful in understanding the reconstructive process involved in the internalization of metaphors.

Metaphor appropriation occurs among teachers, too. Metaphors are part and parcel of the theoretical jargon inherited by teachers as they are exposed to the literature in the field. As Moorman, Blanton and McLaughlin state, "learning to be a professional literacy educator means that through reading and writing, and talking and listening, one learns the socially constructed meanings of the language of literacy instruction" (1994: 310). There is a heteroglossic and reconstructive aspect in teachers' metaphorical language which is revealed in their use of diverse metaphors, sometimes inadvertently adopted from incommensurable theoretical paradigms.

A study on ESL teachers' metaphors

In our study of metaphors in the ESL field,[3] we wanted to see to what extent metaphors were appropriated by teachers and used for the construction of their own personal belief systems. The data for this study were elicited at a workshop titled "Teachers' Beliefs about the Teaching of ESL: What Their Metaphors Say" (for details on the workshop, see Guerrero & Villamil, 2000). At the workshop, the participants, all of whom had previous or current experience as ESL teachers, were given the prompt "An ESL teacher is like . . ."[4] and were asked to write an original metaphor that best represented the way they saw themselves as ESL teachers.[5] During the workshop, we also asked the participants to try to identify the assumptions and theories underlying the metaphors. Twenty-eight metaphors were collected, and through the process of metaphor analysis, the 28 exemplar metaphors were grouped into nine general categories. Table 1 in the Appendix presents the nine categories of conceptual metaphors, a summarized list of exemplar metaphors, and extended examples of metaphors written by the participants.

Most of the similes produced appeared to be quite original, as was requested. Yet, all of them reflected conventional metaphorical conceptualizations of teaching and learning that are present in the culture of ESL educators. For example, in the metaphor comparing the teacher to a *snag in the river*,[6] which sounds quite original, there is an echo of the classical view of teaching as an activity of bringing about change. The teacher sees himself as a *snag in the river*, who, by providing "snags" to the students, can challenge their attitudes of smugness and passivity. The TEACHER AS PROVIDER OF KNOWLEDGE category is another good example. Several related conventional metaphors are noticed in this category. The most obvious ones are those of learning as information processing, language as conduit, and mind as computer. In the *moon* metaphor, for example, the teacher "reflects light" while the learner is the "person receiving reflected light." The learner can in turn "emit light to the teacher." In the *wire in a thick wall* metaphor, "ESL teachers are the medium through which students are exposed to language" while students are "appliances" or "energy seekers." In the *TV set* metaphor, the teacher is the "medium of communication" while the learner is the "viewer." Yet, many other interrelated popular metaphors are at play in this category; for instance, the *moon*, *TV set*, and *sun* metaphors entail the Platonic view of "knowledge as light;" the *wire in a thick wall* and the *tree full of apples* similes suggest that "knowledge is energy or food" (the *tree* simile with overtones of the Biblical "tree of knowledge"); and the *missile* metaphor is consistent with other documented military metaphors in the L2/FL field. The view of the TEACHER AS ARTIST, captured by the metaphor "An ESL teacher is like a potter who models clay into unique works of art," is highly conventional in the field of education, revealing a popular belief in teaching as an aesthetic experience. It seems then that the metaphors that teachers used to characterize themselves were

consistent with models existing in their culture.

The fact that so many culturally sanctioned beliefs underlying metaphors were detected in this study is supported by a sociocultural theory of the mind in which metaphors are seen as psychological tools shaped by, as well as shaping, interactions with the social medium. Our hypothesis is that the process by which teachers form their professional beliefs involves to a large extent the appropriation of the metaphorical jargon of their culture. We submit there is a heavily metaphorical language that ESL teachers are exposed to: the language in textbooks and reference books teachers read as part of their academic training and daily work, the speech teachers learn as students from teachers and mentors as part of their "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), and last, but not least, the language of folk linguistics. In the interaction with these cultural sources, where both humans and artifacts mediate, the discourse of the profession is formed, disseminated, acquired, and perpetuated.

The process of appropriation involves not only transmission but also reconstruction. As culturally shared metaphors are internalized, they are re-constructed and transformed in a process where both the personal experience of the teacher and a multiplicity of social voices–heteroglossia--come into play. The result is always the transformation of a widespread cultural tool into a personal conceptualization where the cognitive, social, and experiential are inextricably fused together. Sometimes the process of reconstruction is characterized by great syncretism. Some of the exemplar metaphors produced in our study, as well as their stated and implied assumptions, reveal combinations of appropriated constructs that come from very different theoretical paradigms.

In the *coach* metaphor, for example, there is a stated belief in the need for "constant encouragement, support, feedback, and opportunities for practice and using the L2" and for

"interaction" between teacher and learners and among learners. The participant also proclaims a theoretical adherence to a "combination of acquisition and learning": "acquisition by exposure (playing, trying harder)" and "learning through guidance provided by the coach." The participant further expresses her view of the teacher as the "source of information for language and culture." The result is a highly personalized amalgam of assumptions and beliefs, suggesting influences from various theoretical models. Although the participant explicitly invokes Krashen's classic acquisition/learning duality, the distinction between the terms is not the same as that conceived by Krashen (1982). "Exposure" for this participant is not merely receiving input; it means doing something with the input; it's putting it to use. There is emphasis on interaction and practice, aspects which are absent in Krashen's acquisition model and are more in tune with interactionist and output hypotheses (Swain, 1995), and even with behavioristic views of learning as response strengthening (Mayer, 1996).

Mixing up diverse, often conflicting, paradigms was not unusual. The author of the *movie theater director* metaphor expresses his theoretical belief in "the importance of Krashen's comprehensible input and conversation." It is well-known that Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis dismisses conversation (talking, practice) as irrelevant to acquisition. Somehow, however, this participant has merged those two elements together. A similar fusion occurs in the *trail guide* metaphor in its emphasis on affective factors and collaboration. As its author explains, her major concern is with easing fears and anxiety among learners, a principle of L2 teaching which she explicitly traces to "Krashen's affective filter." One way of allaying the students' fears is, according to the participant, "collaboration . . . a kind of buddy system . . . which can be linked to Vygotsky." In this conceptualization, the participant is blending Krashen's and Vygotsky's

theories, two theoretical stances that are mostly incommensurable (Dunn and Lantolf, 1998).

Conflicting personal beliefs are also fused in these metaphors. In the *convertible car* metaphor, for example, the teacher's innovative attitude is represented by the convertible car, while the learners are portrayed as the bumps and rocks on the road which do not allow the teacher to reach her goals (the super highway). The second part of the metaphor reflects a highly entrenched view in the L2/FL literature of learners as "resistors"and "problematic." The metaphor thus presents a conflict between the two conceptualizations involved. Whereas the author claims teachers should be "flexible" and "open," this teacher herself seems to have an implicit inflexible and directed agenda (the super highway), which she is prevented from reaching by the obstacles (learners) that block her path.

In addition to their cultural and social meanings, the metaphors in our study displayed the effects of the participants' individual trajectories as ESL teachers. The metaphors the participants created often emphasized personal preferences, attitudes, and grievances accumulated through years of experience. The *tree full of apples* metaphor, where the fruit is refused by the birds, is a desperate teacher's cry of frustration. The *shooting star* metaphor, on the other hand, reveals a more hopeful and optimistic attitude towards teaching. Particular contextual and experiential elements seem to have played an important part in the participants' metaphorical construction of themselves. This finding lends weight to Tobin's assertion (1990) that "the conceptualization of a role, and the metaphor used to make sense of it, is dependent on the context in which teaching and learning occurs" (p. 126).

Conclusion

In short, our application of a sociocultural perspective on teachers' metaphors revealed a complex process of appropriation and transformation, whereby the conventional metaphors of the group (in this case, the ESL teaching professionals) were adopted in a largely intact fashion, but with varying underlying conceptualizations reflecting differences in individual mappings across conceptual domains as well as the influence of both multiple social voices and personal teaching experiences.

To conclude, we would like to recommend the use of metaphor as a tool to increase self-reflection among L2/FL teachers. Because reflection is mediated activity (Antonek, McCormick and Donato, 1997), sociocultural theory supports the use of metaphor as a tool for reflection. It is important for working and prospective teachers to become aware of the powerful and extensive way in which metaphors shape educational beliefs and practices. Teachers are not usually aware of the extent and the impact of metaphor in the discourse of their profession. They not only do not recognize metaphors as such, they are unaware of the original premises of much metaphorical jargon. It is important for teachers to acknowledge, as Donato indicates, the "far-reaching implications about learning that derive from the adoption of one metaphor or another" (2000, p. 40). We believe teachers need to critically examine the extent to which the metaphors they choose are genuine reflections of their beliefs and how they affect the way they teach.

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Endnotes

[1]This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 2001 AAAL Annual Meeting.

[2]The rift between "cognitive" and "social" approaches to metaphor occurs mainly on the nature of conceptual structures. The cognitive view, best represented by the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980; Lakoff, 1993), holds that thought itself is structured metaphorically, whereas the social (or cultural) perspective contends that the metaphors that people use refer to, rather than constitute, certain abstract cultural models that exist apart from their metaphorical instantiations (Quinn, 1991). The "social" and the "cognitive" approaches, however, do not lie too far apart from each other. Both views accept the idea that a great number of the metaphors used in everyday language are conventional in nature. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (1980; Lakoff, 1993) do acknowledge the cultural and social basis of conceptual metaphors whereas Quinn (1991), on her part, works within a general–albeit "weak"–cognitive framework. (For further details on these two views, see Cameron, 1999, and Cameron & Low, 1999a.)

[3]This study is the result of a broad on-going research project on metaphors in the ESL field, including analyses of teachers', learners', and student teachers' metaphors. For further details, see Guerrero and Villamil (2000) and Guerrero and Villamil (in press).

[4]In this study, similes (that is, stated comparisons where the two elements are joined by "like" or "as") are considered instantiations of metaphor. In this we follow Cameron and Low's (1999a, p. 83) criterion that a simile is metaphoric when the two elements juxtaposed in the comparison belong to two different domains. Similes have been used as data in metaphor analysis (Marchant, 1992).

[5] Because this is a study of what teachers "say" rather than what they "do," the

participants' responses should not be taken as representative of their behavior in the classroom. It should be clear that we make no claims that the metaphors the participants produced correlate in any way with their practice.

"The following notation system is used in this analysis:

CAPITALS	To denote conceptual categories
italics	To enclose linguistic or exemplar metaphors produced by the participants
"double quotation marks"	To indicate words used by the participants in their worksheets

Appendix

Table 1

An ESL teacher is like . . .

Conceptual metaphors	Exemplar metaphors	Examples
COOPERATIVE LEADER	*a coach, a little leagues coach, a trail guide, a movie/ theater director, an instrument of God, a symphony director*	✓a trail guide, guiding students through the forest of English and easing their fears about getting lost
PROVIDER OF KNOWLEDGE	*the moon, a wire in a thick wall, a television set, the sun, a missile, a tree full of apples*	✓the moon, reflecting the beautiful light of an additional language and culture . . . . The learner is the person receiving reflected light and . . . in turn emitting light to the teacher, which can be reflected back to other learners. ✓a wire in a thick wall searching for an outlet (context) in which to introduce energy
CHALLENGER/ AGENT OF CHANGE	*a snag in the river, a window to the world, a bullfighter, a lion tamer, a gateway to the future, a shooting star*	✓a snag in the river (Most students just want to cruise downstream and see assigned work as interfering with their "free flow.") ✓a shooting star that gives you the opportunity to make a wish come true: "I will learn English"
NURTURER	*a bee, a busy bee, Mother Nature, a gardener*	✓a gardener who gives his/her plants TLC: water, fertilizer, pruning, insecticide (at times). Each plant develops at its own rate.
INNOVATOR	*an explorer, a convertible car*	✓a convertible car going through a bumpy rock infested road hoping to reach a super highway soon
PROVIDER OF TOOLS	*a tool carrier*	✓a tool carrier which delivers [tools] to every constructor of language. Together they build the road for others to walk.
ARTIST	*a potter*	✓a potter who models clay into unique works of art
REPAIRER	*a mechanic of the mind*	✓a mechanic of the mind
GYM INSTRUCTOR	*a person starting an aerobics class*	✓a person starting an aerobics class . . . . It's a lot of hot sweaty work, but the results are usually gratifying . . . . In teaching you need warm up practices--building background, eliciting prior knowledge, brainstorming. Then you start building muscles--building vocabulary and skill.